1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

422 The children look after and feed these animals a little, and will cry if they are sold. The parents however are at perfect liberty to sell them, if they wish to, without consulting the owner; the money is said to be set against the expenses incurred for the child's clothes. If on the other hand the parents kill the animals for sacrifice or food, they have to replace them, and any young the animals bear belong to the owner. Also when they are still very young children are given a tiny piece of land as their own field; at first the parents help them with their work, but by about the age of twelve the children are expected to be able to look after them by themselves. As the children grow older the size of their field is increased. The grain from the children's fields is harvested separately and kept in a special container, but the house-mother can use it for household purposes without consulting the child. The produce is stated to be set against the children's clothes and knife, and, in the case of young girls, jewels. In general the privately-
422 owned animals and grain are not set apart from the others in any
● 583 way; only when girls go to their husband's village they take with them their private animals and the last year's harvested grain as a sort of dowry. When a wife settles into her husband's home she is generally given small portions of rice terrace and cardamum field, from the proceeds of which she can buy jewels. In this manner everybody, even the youngest children, is given the appearance of being self-supporting, of feeding and clothing themselves by their own work.

422 It seems as though nearly everybody except the very poorest have a few private animals. Mrs. Datoop, one of the richer women in Lingthem, says that at her marriage she brought with her six or seven cattle and other animals. She now owns ten head of cattle, three rice terraces, and two cardamum fields which yield about sixteen maunds; she bought her very fine jewels with the proceeds. When her two daughters were married each took with her a pair of each sort of animal, a big copper pot, and jewels which had been bought from the proceeds of their grain and animals. Her daughter-in-law Mrs. Pembu, brought with her when she was married oxen, goats, chickens and crops; but most of these have been used for the household, and now she only claims as her own two pigs and three chickens. Her jewels are all presents from relatives. Since she and her husband are the sole owners of their property she has no private land.

Chimpet, Tafoor's oldest son, aged fourteen, owns a pig given

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

582 whom the Mandal was looking after, Takshyom, Kurma's nineteen-year-old nephew, and Kanchok, the seventeen-year-old adopted son of Chelim. Of these three it is possible that Satéo will never be married; if he were hale and able to do his work properly his poverty would not stand in his way; but nobody would want to give their daughter to a poor cripple. In Lingthem there is no suitable unrelated girl; if there were one the Mandal would probably arrange the match. The other two wards are expected to be betrothed shortly, as soon as a suitable partner with a fitting horoscope can be found. Mental defectives are never married, and people with incapacitating physical defects practically never.

583 There are two stages in Lepcha marriage: *asék*, or betrothal, and *bri* or bringing home the bride. *Asék* is actually the validating ceremony at which the formal gifts from the family of the groom to that of the bride are presented; these gifts are called 'the price of the bride' and once they are accepted the groom has full access to his bride and all children born after *asék* are considered as legitimate. But until the large and expensive marriage feast or *bri* has been performed, the wife and, possibly, her children, stay at her father's house save possibly for short visits; and during this period the son-in-law is, as it were, his father-in-law's servant, and has to go and work for him whenever he is summoned and cannot leave without obtaining his permission; he is in a subordinate position, and, though he may be taunted, must never answer back.

584 Marriages are always arranged through the offices of two *bek-bu*, or between-men, one representing each party. In theory any old and experienced man who knows how to make the formal and flowery speeches in *tang-bor* or allusive periphrases[6] can fill this rôle and in other villages there are a number of *bek-bu*; but in Lingthem in the last twenty years in all but two of the sixty marriages which have taken place the Mandal has filled this rôle. In theory the biological parents should have nothing at all to do with their children's marriages; were they to do so either the children would die young or the marriage would break up. All the negotiations concerning a marriage are carried on by the paternal or maternal uncles of the children, preferably a paternal-uncle-older-than-father, or people standing in this relation; but in point of fact the parents are always surreptitiously, and sometimes fairly openly consulted. The demand for marriage is always made in

[6] For further explanations of *tang-bor* and examples see Chapter Ten, p. 265.

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point of fact it comes to an exchange of identical goods. The formal marriage gifts are always meant to be new and unused; and it is a point of honour for all those who can afford to give them to do so.

The length of the period between *asék* and marriage varies between a few weeks and a few years according to the wealth of the people providing the marriage feast. In the case of young people this is entirely provided by their families and does not entail any feeling of indebtedness nor does the expense have to be repaid; it is an absolute gift, a further link in the chain of mutual benefits which bind Lepchas together. This is not the case if men of property wish to marry or re-marry; they have to provide the expense themselves and if they borrow from others they have to repay what they borrow. In the case of poor people who wish to marry there are two possible solutions; from a suitable groom the girl's parents may consent to receive the symbolical gift of a piece of roast meat (*akut*) instead of the proper *asék* presents, which represent a cash value of about Rs. 60; or the Mandal may advise and help the prospective groom to give a feast, at which all the neighbours will contribute in money or kind to pay for the marriage feast. In Lingthem this has been done twice in recent years. The cash value of the gifts, animals and grain demanded by the complete *asék* and marriage ceremonies is computed to be about Rs. 300. By far the greater part of this is involved in the food consumed at the marriage feast.

There is one other potential arrangement by which men without much property or a large family can obtain a wife. In a family where there are no sons it is possible, if the parents so wish, that the groom, instead of taking the daughter away to his home, shall live permanently in the home of his parents-in-law, acting as their son, and eventually inheriting their property; in such cases only small *asék* presents are given and the expense of the lesser marriage feast is borne by the girl's family. But this arrangement is not very popular or very common; people do not much like the idea of having a stranger permanently in the home, and prefer either to adopt a young child, or else to let the property pass at their death to a *ké-tsop*;[8] and for most men the probable permanent separation from their families and friends is undesirable. This resident son-in-law is called *komok myok*. There are two men so situated in Lingthem, Tempa and Kurma *gyapön*, both somewhat maladjusted. Kurma is not a real stranger, for he was

[8] See Chapter Three, p. 106.

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born in the neighbouring village of Panung; the wife to whose house he went is now dead, though her mother is still living there; Kurma is *asék*'d to another woman whom he hopes to bring home in 1938. Besides these two men there are two other men living in Lingthem who were not born there; these are Katel, whose story has already been told, and Takneum *youmi*, who was adopted as a boy by his father's married sister.

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It sometimes happens that after *asék* has been performed the boy and girl feel a really strong repulsion for one another. In many cases a girl will simulate repulsion and will refuse to let her groom sleep with her; but this is thought to be chiefly due to shame and to dislike of having to leave her parents' home; and therefore the young people are cajoled and bribed and threatened and even sometimes beaten to make them like one another. If however the repulsion felt is really strong and there seems no possibility of breaking it down, two solutions are open; either the whole arrangement is called off and the gifts or their equivalents in money returned, or else an alternative spouse, usually a younger brother of the groom and occasionally a younger sister of the bride, is offered instead. The best example of these arrangements can be shown in the history of Rigya. Rigya, who is twenty-two years old, was *asék*'d when he was about fifteen to one girl, but they did not get on at all well together and after a time the Mandal arranged for the marriage payments to be given back. His eldest brother, Aplung, was also *asék*'d to a girl he disliked; he therefore gave her to his youngest brother, Gyatso, who did not want her and ran away to Gangtok to work as a carpenter; thereupon the girl was given to Rigya, who was the middle brother. This is a somewhat irregular arrangement because Gyatso was younger than Rigya; but since Aplung was older she was looked on as being originally the wife of the elder brother and therefore marriageable. Aplung subsequently married a widow, a woman considerably older than himself.

Most consummated marriages are stable and divorce or separation is very rare. The chief cause of divorce is usually for incompatibility of character or refusal to work properly on the part of the wife. If a man sends his wife away he has to pay a fine of Rs. 88 to the girl's father and has to divide with the wife all the movable

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

584 know one another at all before betrothal. In a relatively few cases they are near neighbours, in which case the betrothal is more likely to have been arranged at the request of the boy, or the children may have met casually on visits. This is particularly liable to happen when a woman's daughters marry back into their mother's village. Before the actual betrothal visit is made an 'uncle' of the boy may take him on a visit to inspect his future spouse; the boy may be asked if he fancies the girl, but the question is really a formality, for if he says 'No' this reply is usually put down to shame, and the betrothal is proceeded with regularly.

The first preliminary to arranging a marriage is a visit of the *bek-bu* by himself to the girl's village; on this visit he will take with him a load of *chi*. He will go to some neighbouring house—never the house where the girl herself lives—and will discover what man of the village is acting as the girl's *bek-bu*; to this man he will give the load of *chi* and start negotiations for the marriage. The girl's *bek-bu* will discuss the proposition with the girl's family—particularly her uncles—but the father and mother are also unofficially consulted. As a matter of form the girl's family will belittle the match on the first conversation, saying that they do not wish yet to get rid of their daughter, that the proposed match is not good enough, and so on. If they do not know the boy proposed they will send to make enquiries about his character, as to whether he is a good and industrious worker, peaceable and generous. The girl's family will always refuse at the first discussion and usually at the second; if they have not agreed when the subject is broached for the third time the negotiations are called off. If they do agree the *bek-bu* will present them with a ceremonial scarf and a rupee and a date will be set for the formal *asék*, dependent on the lama's horoscope not being completely unfavourable. This preliminary is called *kachyoong*.

583 For *asék* considerable gifts are demanded, and these are called 'the price of the bride'. These gifts do not actually represent the chief expense of the marriage—that is involved in the marriage feast—but they are articles which are not consumed in common but which are given over to the family of the girl. After these gifts have been accepted the marriage is considered to be legitimatised, even though the groom has not brought his bride home; children born after *asék* are fully legitimate, and if the betrothal is broken, either the gifts or their equivalent in money must be returned, or another girl provided as substitute. The *asék* gifts consist of two

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

pigs, a large copper pot, or in lieu of it Rs. 20 for the girl's father, a length of fine cloth, or in lieu Rs. 13 (formerly Rs. 20) for the mother, Rs. 3 for the bride, and a ceremonial scarf and a rupee for the girl's *bek-bu*.

When these gifts have been collected, they are consecrated by a special Mun ritual in the groom's house before being taken to the girl's family. If the house contains a lamaist altar this is decorated and *chimi* are lit, and the offerings placed before it, the disembowelled pigs in front, and behind the copper pot with the other gifts on top of it. An officiant is needed to consecrate the gifts; it is preferable that the 'sacrificer', the *rum-faat-bu*, should be a Mun, but it can also be performed by any old and experienced layman with the necessary qualification. Incense is burned, *chi* from a buttered cup and rice offered, and a long invocation is made to the gods to bless the marriage and make it fruitful; besides the personal and *ptso* supernaturals of the groom special emphasis is placed on the appeal to Komsi*thing* and Tarbong-bo, who are involved in the original institution of marriage.[2] After the consecration a ceremonial meal of rice and sausages made from the pig's intestines is eaten, and the groom then sets off with his *bek-bu* and three men to carry the presents. The carriers should be ideally a paternal uncle, a maternal uncle and an elder brother; failing them, people standing in a similar position are employed.

At this visit the groom and his party usually stop three or four days at the girl's house. The two betrothed are meant to keep together, sitting by one another and feeding one another, and to sleep side by side. At this initial meeting the attention of all the elders is concentrated on noticing the way the two young people behave towards one another; because of this attention, and on account of the general situation, the young couple are usually in an agony of self-conscious shame and can hardly bear to look at or speak to one another.

After this initial visit the *asék* party returns home, but a few days later the groom makes a second visit, taking with him a gift of meat and usually accompanied by an uncle. At this visit the young couple, if they are of a suitable age, are meant to copulate together, and their uncles are meant to supervise this operation to make sure it takes place; if they do not, the one who refuses to do so—and it is considered equally likely that the refuser will be the boy or the girl—will be severely admonished and may be thrashed by

[2] See Appendix IV. The Sacred Story of the Origin of Marriage.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

583 his or her uncle to make him like his partner. For if the two do not
584 sleep together the girl will not be able to 'lighten her mothers' shoulder' (that is, help her mother-in-law), and the boy will shame his parents and all the expense that the parents have been put to will be wasted. Moreover, should the couple separate, the girl's family will be blamed for not seeing that they made love.

584 This is another situation in which the Lepchas' formulation of ideal behaviour differs very considerably from their practice. Betrothal is very often a period of great emotional stress, especially for the girl who will energetically refuse to have anything to do with her proposed husband. In all the cases that came to my notice of betrothed couples getting on badly together the pair had never achieved copulation and the older Lepchas in referring to these situations always stated that the difficulties would be got over if the pair slept together—a statement which seems to be borne out by experience. But just because the girls also hold this belief they repulse their husbands with even greater energy; I am almost certain that this repulsion is actuated not by physical or emotional distaste for the husband but by a deep-seated fear of leaving their family and their surroundings. In such situations the Lepcha theory calls for physical punishment of the recalcitrant party, but Lepcha practice makes such behaviour very unpleasant. The result is a good deal of threatenings and grumblings and no actions at all. In such situations those adults not directly responsible for the behaviour of the children are full of loud talk as to the energetic steps which should be taken; the responsible adults are full of excuses for putting off the crisis until another occasion.

In Lingthem in 1937 there were five boys or young men who were *asék*'d and three who had only had their wives home a few weeks or months. Of these, three had had very stormy betrothals in which the hostility had lasted for several years. In one case, that of Nariya, who was thirty years old (he had been married earlier but the marriage had broken down because of the girl's promiscuity followed by her running away with all the available valuables and cash), this hostility continued even after the performance of the marriage feast and a peaceful settlement only approached during the last days of my stay there. Nariya's wife was fourteen, a large overgrown girl. After three years' betrothal the marriage feast was
593 celebrated in the late autumn of 1936. Immediately after the
585 marriage the girl returned home and refused to have anything to do with her husband, saying: 'I do not want to see your face,' and

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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MIKMAR AND CHIMPET PLAYING

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MIKMAR GOES OFF WITH THE *ASÉK* GIFTS TO SEE HIS NEWLY AFFIANCED BRIDE, WHOM HE DOESN'T KNOW

He is wearing his best clothes. With him are on the left Gongyop's son, with the pig on his back, and Kurma's nephew Takshyom holding a lantern, and with the copper bowl on his back; on the right Chinya, Mikmar's "paternal uncle" (really his second cousin once removed) and Chala Mandal, who is *bek-bu*. The wife lives two days' journey away. On the fence are reeds which have been bent when green drying for thatch.

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2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

587 but the party was continued until dawn the next day. Since this was not a first marriage the full three-day festivities were not carried out: nor will Ongden and his bride make the usual ceremonial visit to her people. In this particular case there was, I gather, really no need for him to have done any ceremony except the formal betrothal; but since he is
[554] a man of standing in the village he has preferred to do things properly. In any case, no Lepcha will miss the opportunity of throwing a party, provided the necessary funds are available.

15th March:

A number of "corpses" lying about under the bushes. Most of these had removed themselves by nightfall.

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●583 Before betrothal a boy usually does a certain amount of work for his future father-in-law, and may even stay in his house should he happen to live in the same village. This service is entirely voluntary and is in no sense looked upon as payment for the bride. After the formal betrothal has taken place, however, the girl's parents can call upon the boy's services for a period of three years; but if the marriage takes place within this period the obligation ceases.

591 When a man has a daughter and no sons he arranges, if
584 possible, that his son-in-law shall live in his house, in which case the boy becomes what is known as a *Komok myok*. In these circumstances he is treated exactly as though he were the real son of the house, except that he has a less hard time. It is not always easy for a man to obtain a *Komok myok* for his daughter; for unless such a boy has several brothers his father will not normally wish to lose him, since it means that he will have no one to help him work his own fields.

431 When a man is so poor that he cannot afford even the
585 minimum marriage gifts everyone in the village helps him. This is looked upon as a gift and is not repayable. It is,

7: Hooker D-5 (1849-1851) 1854
AK5 Lepcha AK5

Some [1] are supposed to be antidotes against [752]
poison, and hence fetch an enormous price; they are of a 415
peculiar wood, rarer and paler-coloured. I have paid a [435]
guinea for one such, hardly different from the common
sort, which cost but 4*d.* or 6*d.* MM. Huc and Gabet
graphically allude to this circumstance, when wishing to
purchase cups at Lhassa, where their price is higher, as
they are all imported from the Himalaya. The knots from
which they are formed, are produced on the roots of oaks,
maples, and other mountain forest trees, by a parasitical [B7]
plant, known to botanists as *Balanophora*.

Their intoxicating drink, which seems more to excite 273
than to debauch the mind, is partially fermented Murwa
grain (*Eleusine Coracana*). Spirits are rather too strong
to be relished raw, and when a glass of wine is given to
one of a party, he sips it, and hands it round to all the
rest. A long bamboo flute, with four or six burnt holes 534
far below the mouth-hole, is the only musical instrument
I have seen in use among them. When travelling, and the 517
fatigues of the day are over, the Lepchas will sit for hours
chatting, telling stories, singing in a monotonous tone,
or blowing this flute. I have often listened with real 533
pleasure to the simple music of this rude instrument; its
low and sweet tones are singularly Æolian, as are the
airs usually played, which fall by octaves: it seems to
harmonize with the solitude of their primæval forests, and
he must have a dull ear who cannot draw from it the
indication of a contented mind, whether he may relish its
soft musical notes or not. Though always equipped for 224
the chase, I fancy the Lepcha is no great sportsman;
there is little to be pursued in this region, and he is not
driven by necessity to follow what there is.

Their marriages are contracted in childhood, and the 583
wife purchased by money, or by service rendered to the 582

[1] [i.e., wooden cups.-Analyst]

7: Hooker D-5 (1849-1851) 1854
AK5 Lepcha AK5

future father-in-law, the parties being often united before the woman leaves her parents' roof, in cases where the payment is not forthcoming, and the bridegroom prefers giving his and his wife's labour to the father for a stated period in lieu. On the time of service expiring, or the money being paid up, the marriage is publicly celebrated by feasting and riot. The females are generally chaste, and the marriage-tie is strictly kept, its violation being heavily punished by divorce, beating, slavery, &c. In cases of intermarriage with foreigners, the children belong to the father's country. All the labours of the house, the field, and march, devolve on the women and children, or slaves if they have them.

Small-pox is dreaded, and infected persons often cruelly shunned: a suspicion of this or of cholera frequently emptying a village or town in a night. Vaccination has been introduced by Dr. Pearson, and it is much practised by Dr. Campbell; it being eagerly sought. Cholera is scarcely known at Dorjiling, and when it has been imported thither has never spread. Disease is very rare amongst the Lepchas; and ophthalmia, elephantiasis, and leprosy, the scourges of hot climates, are rarely known. Goitre prevails,* though not so conspicuously as amongst Bhoteeas,

* May not the use of the head instead of the shoulder-strap in carrying loads be a predisposing cause of goitre, by inducing congestion of the laryngeal vessels? The Lepcha is certainly far more free from this disease than any of the tribes of E. Nepal I have mixed with, and he is both more idle and less addicted to the head-strap as a porter. I have seen it to be almost universal in some villages of Bhoteeas, where the head-strap alone is used in carrying in both summer and winter crops; as also amongst the salt-traders, or rather those families who carry the salt from the passes to the Nepalese villages, and who very frequently have no shoulder-straps, but invariably head-bands. I am far from attributing all goitre, even in the mountains, to this practice, but I think it is proved, that the disease is most prevalent in the mountainous regions of both the old and new world, and that in these the practice of supporting enormous loads by the cervical muscles is frequent. It is also found in the Himalayan sheep and goats which accompany the salt-traders, and whose loads are supported in ascending, by a band passing under the throat.